

Janie Benton: "The More We Know About Each Other, The Closer We Become"

Note: ProMayak Interview with Janie Benton published November 16, 2001

In accordance with the Agreement between Russia and the United States and other documents of the HEU-LEU program (the use of highly enriched uranium removed from nuclear weapons), a group of American observers worked at the Mayak Production Association (MPA) from November 11 through 16. Our correspondent Natalya Peretti interviewed the head of the group Janie Benton, a representative of the United States Department of Energy.



"ProMAYAK": Please tell me about your work within the framework of this Agreement.

Janie Benton: A group of American observers came here to the Mayak facility to work together with their Russian colleagues. We, the representatives of the United States, are observing the HEU processing and have been working with this facility since April 1998. We come here approximately 6 times a year. Many of us have been here more than once. For example, Lloyd Porter has already been here 13 times. And it is necessary to say that we have a wonderful relationship with the people we work with at the Mayak Production Association.

"ProMAYAK": Have the events of September 11 in the United States had any effect on the work of the HEU-LEU program?

Janie Benton: No, of course, there have been no changes in our program since September 11. On the contrary, the people that work in this program have become even closer since the September events. We fully understand how important this program is, especially in the business of transparency (openness of the process) that we are carrying out. In order to make the world safer for our children, I think we must work harder.

"ProMAYAK": How would you appraise the work of the Mayak workers in this program?

Janie Benton: I don't even have the words to express my feelings because we have met with outstanding professionals - wonderful people. And the more we learn about one another, the closer we become.

Also, we have been very lucky in that working on this project; we have the opportunity to meet people in Russia as we do the United States. When we come here the people are warm and good-natured, and meet us with much hospitality.

"ProMAYAK": And what would you say about those who directly prepare the product for transfer for fluoridation, about those people that work in the shops?

Janie Benton: We always emphasize that the technical personnel of the factory, who carry out the

work of the contract, understand the importance of the task. These people are outstanding professionals.

P.S. The group of American HEU-LEU program observers not only works successfully with the specialists at "Mayak", but, as it turns out, also cares for the Ozyorsk orphanage. During their most recent visit, they brought gifts for the children. The meeting took place in the orphanage and was very warm. Certainly we were attracted to this human-interest story. Therefore, going with the Americans to the orphanage, we asked them to tell us both about this real aid and about the system of social protection for orphan children in the United States.

Visiting With The Children

Conversation with Janie Benton about the charitable visit of the American observers continued with our correspondent Olga Yershova in the office of Valeriy Pavlovich Yemel'yanov, the director of the Science-and-Technology office at MPA.

"ProMAYAK": Do you have similar institutions? If you do, what are they called and who sponsors them? How are children raised in such institutions?



Janie Benton: Yes, we have similar orphanages. For example, I live in Maryland, and we have an orphanage that is sponsored by a church. A board of trustees runs the orphanage. We also have a common government charitable organization known as the United Way. This organization finances orphanages. I know, for example, an organization in Maryland that is sponsored by the church receives funding from the donations of the parishioners. From there the money is sent to the orphanage.

"ProMAYAK": How do children end up in these orphanages?

Janie Benton: Unfortunately we have similar problems in our country that exist in many other countries. For example, families in which parents use narcotics or abuse alcohol. Therefore, children from such families often are sent to an orphanage or to temporarily live with another family.

"ProMAYAK": Is this a difficult process to send a child with living parents to an orphanage or to live with another family?

Janie Benton: Yes, it's a very painful process that could take several years.

"ProMAYAK": How often are children adopted out of orphanages?

Janie Benton: Not as often as in your country. Our system is a little different. A lot of families want a child, but legally they can't adopt the child because there are still living parents. That is, the child goes to a new family, lives there, becomes a member of this family, but his parents may have the right to see him periodically. We have a state-level social service organization. This

organization ensures that there are no violations.

"ProMAYAK": What do children call those people they live with and what do they call their biological parents?

Janie Benton: It depends on the situation. If they are small children, they begin to call these people mama and papa, if they are older children, then we in America call everyone by their first names. But this all depends on the child, of course. The situation is not easy. We ensure that a child in an orphanage, upon completion of school, has some kind of trade to be able to earn a living.

"ProMAYAK": Such parentless children in the States probably live fairly well materially?

Janie Benton: Yes, I would say that this is true. They have a good standard of living in the orphanages and the families. Of course we don't want to see children go hungry or without clothing.

"ProMAYAK": The Ozyorsk Orphanage is not the only facility that you visit. Could you tell us a couple of words about those people that play an important role in this work?

Janie Benton: There are 100 observers that work in our HEU-LEU program at four sites. We often travel to these sites and establish good relations with the workers. At their suggestion, we go to a close orphanage and help them. One of our observers, Alice Lay, adopted a child from Russia. She is a remarkably kind person. We were all captivated by this. We are all full of enthusiasm and it is a pleasure to help the children. In certain instances we provide medical aid. There were two instances: we sent two little children from Russia to the United States where they had heart operations, and another two will be operated on this year. We also try to provide material aid. We have bought sewing machines, various work instruments and children's things that the orphanage needs. We also help with medications and medical equipment.

P.S. The meeting in our orphanage was a very warm one, once again showing that love and compassion know no borders.